WISCONSIN DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Department of Health and Family Services

# Hepatitis D
## (Delta agent)

*Disease Fact Sheet Series*

**What is hepatitis D?**
Hepatitis D is an infection of the liver caused by a defective virus (delta agent). Delta agent can cause infection only in those individuals who have an active hepatitis B infection or who are a hepatitis B carrier.

**Who gets hepatitis D?**
In the United States, hepatitis D infection occurs most commonly in persons who are at high risk of hepatitis B infection, particularly drug addicts and persons with hemophilia. Persons who are hepatitis B carriers are at increased risk of hepatitis D infection, especially as they participate in activities which put them at risk of repeated exposure to hepatitis D (e.g., intravenous drug abuse, and unsafe sex, especially among homosexuals).

**How is the virus spread?**
Routes of transmission of hepatitis D are similar to those of hepatitis B. For this reason, it is seen in individuals who have received a blood transfusion or have shared needles during drug abuse.

**What are the symptoms?**
Onset of symptoms is usually abrupt and includes fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting and occasionally joint pain, hives or rash. Urine may become dark in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. Some individuals may experience few or no symptoms.

**How soon do symptoms occur?**
The time period in man between exposure and onset of symptoms has not been firmly established; this period in experimentally infected chimpanzees is 2-10 weeks.

**When and how long is a person able to spread hepatitis D?**
Blood is potentially infectious during all phases of acute delta agent infection, but an individual is probably most infectious just prior to onset of his illness. A chronically infected person's blood may continue to be infectious.

**What is the treatment for hepatitis D?**
There are no medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat individuals with hepatitis D.

**Is there a specific test for hepatitis D?**
A test for detection of total antibody to hepatitis D virus is commercially available. Other tests that detect early infection are available only in research labs.

**How can the spread of hepatitis D be prevented?**
Since hepatitis D virus is dependent on hepatitis B virus to reproduce itself, prevention of hepatitis B infection will suffice to prevent hepatitis D in those susceptible to hepatitis B.

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